

honesty by contraryrhythm

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Summary:

Nancy chose Steve, but she left Jonathan with some unanswered questions. The truth comes out.

(AKA my knee-jerk fix-it fic after finishing season one and finding out Nancy got back together with Steve. Sigh.)

honesty

He finds her sitting on the bleachers with her backpack beside her, writing in a notebook. Her lips are pursed in concentration. Her pen scrawls steadily across the page as she shivers slightly in the January wind. The pen pauses, taps, begins again. She's the only one here, save for a few jocks tossing a football at the other end of the field. For a moment, he allows himself to watch her. His fingers are itching for his camera--the camera she gave him--to capture that lone female silhouette against an empty gray sky.

The breeze blows her hair across the page as she writes, and she tucks the strands impatiently behind her ear. As she does, she catches sight of him. There's a moment, the space between one heartbeat and then next, where she just looks at him--surprised? disappointed? uncertain? He can't read her face. Then she smiles.

"Hi," she says.

"Hi," he replies.

He slowly walks up the bleachers to sit beside her. She closes her notebook and holds it on her lap. They're silent at first.

"So how have you been?" she asks.

"Fine," he answers. "Will is doing a little better."

Funny how they'd grown so comfortable sharing the intimacy of life-and-death experiences, yet now, back in the real world, they are again reduced to this. Awkward exchanges between the pretty, popular girl and the loner boy. Sometimes he wonders if it was all even real. It would almost be easy to believe the monster had never existed, that Will's disappearance was a fading bad dream. But both of them knew better.

"What was I saying this time?" she asks.

"What do you mean?"

She smiles, clarifies. "If you had taken my photo, when you were

standing down there. What would I be saying?"

He pauses, looks down, smiles wryly. "I don't think I want to tell you."

"Why not?" she asks, indignant.

"You won't like it." Last time he'd told her his impressions, she'd bitten his head off and started an argument that only ended when she was almost killed by the Demogorgon. There's no supernatural villain to push them back together anymore. (Maybe the pursuit of the monster was all they'd had in common, after all.)

"Tell me anyway," she coaxes.

He just shakes his head. "Maybe another time."

He looks down at the field, at the far-off figures of Steve and the other football players messing around and tackling each other. Steve's laughing at two friends who are wrestling over the ball on the grass. The boy looks over to the bleachers and sees them both. He waves. His laughter has faded, and it isn't exactly a cheerful wave, but it's a far cry from fighting in the alley. There's something about fighting a monster together that makes it impossible to hate each other anymore.

Nancy is watching, and she waves back. Jonathan figures that it counts for both of them, but he gives a half-hearted wave too. He's not much of a waver to begin with.

"So you two are back together." The statement, not-quite-an-accusation, hangs in the air.

"Um...yeah," she says, looking down at her notebook. Her hands are fidgeting with the pen on top of it. "You know, he was really brave when he fought the Demogorgon, and he feels awful about what happened with you before. It was really just a misunderstanding. He's better now."

He makes a noncommittal noise. "And is he sorry for what happened with you?"

"Of course he is," she says earnestly. "It was really just Tommy and Carol, he's not like that. He felt terrible."

He shrugs. "Okay." As much as he tries to sound noncommittal, there's a distinct skepticism in his tone.

Of course, she bristles immediately. "What's that supposed to mean?"

He regrets provoking her, but when he sees the fire in her eyes, there's a certain fierce pride that rises in him, a feeling of "rightness" that swallows the awkwardness--not because she's angry, but because it's genuine. The real Nancy Wheeler, none of her masks. This is what they're best at: challenging, bickering, being honest with each other. Honest, above all else.

"It means exactly what I said."

"So you don't think he's sorry?"

"I didn't say that."

"But you meant it?"

He sighs. "Look, I don't think he's a bad guy. He helped us, and I give him credit for that. He even apologized to me. But a guy who lets his friends call you a slut on a billboard is a coward in the first place, and you deserve better than that." He meets her eyes, steadily, and she's the first to look away. She opens her mouth to defend her boyfriend, but Jonathan presses on first. "Look, if he makes you happy, great. I just don't think he makes you that happy."

She looks like he's slapped her. "You have no idea what makes me happy. You told me yourself you don't even know how to talk to people."

"I don't," he retaliates, "but I know what happiness looks like. What it means when you're not pretending to be someone you're not."

"You keep saying that, as if you have some cosmic insight into who I am! Then who am I, huh?"

He shakes his head and stands up, walking down the bleachers. He

jumps onto the grass without looking back.

“Don’t walk away from me, Jonathan!” She stands up too and stomps after him, notebook forgotten. Her legs are shorter and he’s moving quickly, so she only catches up to him when he’s rounded the corner of the bleachers. She grabs his arm, spinning him back to face her. “Hey! That isn’t fair.”

He takes a deep breath, and before he can think twice, he says it: “So was it fair when you held my hand and kissed me and then went back to dating some other guy like it never happened?”

Her breath catches, and her cheeks turn red.

Part of him can’t believe he said it. Part of him is cheering. Part of him is mortified and wants to bolt. Was it even fair of him to say? Maybe he’d just misread her. His heart is pounding.

“Jonathan...it wasn’t like that,” she tries to explain. “I just...”

He’s quiet for a minute, lips pressed together. Then, “Okay. My mistake then. I won’t mention it again.” He moves as if to walk away, then pauses. His eyes flick to hers and then back down. “What you asked me just now. The answer is...that you looked lonely,” he says. “Like you were waiting for something that you didn’t think would ever come.”

He forces himself to meet her eyes one more time before he leaves--it’s the end, after all. Clearly he misinterpreted the situation, and there’s no way Nancy Wheeler will continue to be friends with someone like him when she already has the perfect boyfriend. (Were they ever really friends?)

It’s time to wake up from the dream. This could be the last time they even talk, and maybe that knowledge is what gives him the courage to study her face, memorizing its curves and intricacies. As if he’s taking a photograph, immortalizing every moment of when he and she stood in the same world.

She looks conflicted, desperate, confused, even angry. Even then, her forehead creased in consternation, she’s beautiful. She steps closer,

and he's not sure why she's trying to close the distance when she's saying goodbye.

Then before he can process what's happening, her hands are on his cheeks and her lips are on his and she's kissing him, warm and impulsive and sweet, and heat sweeps from that point of contact all through his body like a tidal wave. He can't think straight, but his hand instinctively moves toward her neck to pull her closer, to kiss her deeper, longer, because in that moment there's nothing in the world but her.

It's over almost as soon as it begins. Too soon. She stumbles back, hand going to her mouth. His own hand hovers in the air awkwardly, then falls back to his side.

"I'm sorry," she stammers, and turns and runs back to the bleachers.

He stands motionless in the grass, hardly breathing. She had kissed him. Unexpected, unreal, quick as a passing thought--but it happened. It was real. Nancy kissed him. Which means she feels something for him.

Probably he should feel confused, and horribly guilty for kissing Steve's girlfriend, and there'll be time for that later, but right now everything is hazy but one thought.

The feeling of her lips lingers against his, and it tastes like hope.